

The Messiah Announces His Mission, Part 2

Luke 4:16-22

We'll start there in Luke chapter 4, and we'll start reading in verse 14. "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out throughout all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

"He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

"And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been

fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' And he said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Physician heal yourself. What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well."'

"And he said, 'Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.'

"When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away."

Notice that word, poor, though; the word poor. Jesus is commissioned by God, he's anointed by the Spirit, to preach the

Gospel to the poor. Now, does that exclude the wealthy? Are we talking about economics here? Personal finance? No. No, we're not. The word here is *ptōchōs*. Technically, it refers to someone who is in abject financial poverty. That's the technical use, but it's referring to someone who's starving and they're penniless and they're reduced to begging. That's how they can survive is just by the good graces of somebody else having mercy on them.

The term could also have an even wider connotation than that. One commentator, Joel Green, writes, "In that culture, one's status in a community was not so much a function of economic realities but depended on a number of elements, including education, gender, family heritage, religious purity, vocation, economic, so on."

Poor would serve as a cypher or code for those of low status. Status is a matter of our own judgment, isn't it? Status is inherited. Status is imbued upon somebody, given to somebody. But it's not a real measure, is it, of a person's worth? It's a matter of judgment. And for those who are *ptōchōs*, humble sinners, they are going to readily acknowledge their low status. They're going to acknowledge and think, not just before God, but before their fellow men, they're going to acknowledge, You know

what, spiritually speaking, I am *ptōchōs*. I am of low status. I am a beggar before God. I have nothing to bring to him.

For them, the Gospel comes as welcome news. It comes as really, really good news, because they know they're low, they know they're nothing, they know they are beggars, and here comes this Gospel, the proclamation of grace. So these people are the repenters; they listened to John's prophetic ministry. They came forward at his baptism. They're the ones who, are, had been readied by John, by the Spirit of God, to receive Jesus' ministry, his Gospel ministry for the *ptōchōs*, for the lowly, this condition of abject spiritual poverty.

The second reason for the Spirit of God resting upon Jesus, first, "He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor," and then second, he starts to unpack a little bit more what the poor look like. Verse 18, "He has sent me." He has sent me. That's the verb *apōstēllō*, from which we get the noun apostle. This carries forward this commission idea, adds the idea of delegated authority.

Jesus is here as one sent by God, *apōstēllō*. He is the special envoy of God. There are three infinitives that follow that verb, showing purpose for which God sent Jesus, the purpose of his anointing by the Spirit. There's a three-fold purpose

here. And each purpose is a further unveiling of God's grace in saving his people from their sins.

Look at purpose number one. God sent the Messiah "to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind." Liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind. When Isaiah originally wrote this, the Babylonian captivity was fresh on Israel's mind. Luke has given us this text in the Septuagint, that's the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture. But the original phraseology in the Hebrew text says, "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and opening of the prison to those who are bound."

And now we read here, "recovery of sight to the blind." Why do we see a discrepancy there? What's the difference? The difference comes, really, just from the translation of a Hebrew phrase that could go either way. It's the phrase, *p'koch koach*. I'm not going to say that a lot. But it refers to the opening of the eyes, as in after an extended imprisonment in a deep, dark, dense dungeon. This is a graphic picture here of the effects of sin; imprisonment in the deepest, darkest depths renders people practically blind, unable to see.

And that's what Israel's captivity had done to this nation. It was the result of persistent, unrepentant sin. The growing

darkness had become a state of spiritual blindness for the entire nation. It was as real and dreadful as being bound in chains, rotting in a dungeon, blind in the darkness where you can't see your hand in front of your face. And pretty soon your eyes just become accustomed to that.

The spiritual significance of the metaphor is this: Sinners are in a state of spiritual captivity where darkness is so deep, so dense, so oppressive that blindness becomes the state of being. They have no hope of rescue. They have no hope of seeing again, of walking free except someone remember them there rotting in the dungeon and someone come to their aid, unshackle them and set them free. Folks, that's what God sent the Messiah to do for you and me, to proclaim that kind of freedom, to unshackle us.

Purpose number two: God sent the Messiah to set at liberty those who are oppressed. It sounds like the same thing, right? But it's not. This is the portion that comes from Isaiah 58:6. And this, this is coming in a context of rebuke against the way Israel had been conducting its fasts. The fasts were to be a day of humbling before God. But the verse says, in contrast to their opulent fasts and, and wrong-headed and spiritually insincere fasts, the verse says in Isaiah 58:6, "Is this not the fast that

I choose, to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

You know what that's pointing back to? That's pointing back to Leviticus 25, which is a passage that commanded Israel to celebrate every 50 years what was called the Year of Jubilee. And that was to be a year of releasing people from their debts and their burdens. Releasing people from their financial obligations, social obligations. Setting them up to start over again and enjoy the prosperity, the bounty of the Lord. It's to be a gracious time, a merciful time, a time to let the oppressed go free. The freedom from economic hardship, from debts that could never be repaid. That pictured what Jesus came to do. He proclaimed liberty to free people from the burden of debts that can never be repaid.

Beloved, this again is us. Sinners owe an eternal debt to God because all our iniquities are sins against an eternal person. Eternal person, eternal debt, eternal consequences, nothing we can do can repay the debt. That's why any system that teaches you to build up your good deeds to outdo your bad deeds is completely corrupt because it diminishes God and it elevates man. Look, we, we are indebted in an eternal debt that we can

never repay. Nothing we can do can repay it. That's why the Gospel comes as such good news. God sent Jesus to set sinners free from the eternal, unpayable debts that they owe to God. For us, it's a continual Year of Jubilee.

The third part of the three-fold purpose for which God sent the Messiah, this brings us to Luke 4:19. It's the final word that Jesus read from Isaiah 61:2. God sent the Messiah to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord; "the year of the Lord's favor." Full verse, as you may know, in Isaiah 61:2, we read it earlier, shows a contrast in time, right? So you've got "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn."

So there's the year of the Lord's favor, that's a longer period, right, than the day of God's vengeance. That's not talking just about the strength, the wideness, the depth, the profundity, the breadth of God's mercy, though it is. It's also talking about the harshness of his wrath. All that wrath stored up, expended in a single day. But Jesus didn't read that part, did he? He stopped mid-verse. He didn't read the portion about the Day of Recompense. He was there at this time, in this advent to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and that year of the Lord's favor had just begun.



Now, notice the emphasis in verse 4:18 on preaching. Notice the continual emphasis on preaching. Why was the Spirit of the Lord upon him? To preach the Gospel. As we said, that's the verb evangelize. Evangelism was originally cast in terms of preaching, in terms of proclamation. Not sharing, by the way, preaching. There are also two uses of the verb, *kērussō*. *Kērussō* is a very common, strong word refers to preaching, translated here in the ESV as proclaim.

So the Spirit was upon Jesus to empower him and to draw attention to his preaching. That's why the Spirit was upon Jesus in power and I might add, miracle-working power. He had miracles that validated his message, miracles that validated him as God's messenger, miracles that pointed people to the truth of the message he preached.

Spirit of the Lord was upon him because he had, God had anointed him to preach the Gospel. God had sent him to proclaim liberty, to free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. That is the point of the miracles to direct people to the content of Jesus' ministry of preaching and proclamation. It's about the truth. It's about the written and revealed Word of God.

The focus on signs and wonders is exactly what Jesus rebuked Israel for doing. He said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign." Sadly, folks, it all started right here in his own hometown, gathering at the synagogue among Jesus' childhood congregation in Nazareth. Like the rest of Israel, they wanted miracles, they wanted signs and wonders. "What you did at Capernaum, do here as well."

What they missed was the true light that was shining right in front of them. Isaiah 9:2, "The people who walked in darkness," that's them, "they've have seen a great light." The people indwelling in a land of deep darkness, then the light has shone. The light shining brightly in Nazareth that day, brilliant like a, like a strobe, like a lighthouse, called them all to the light to see that there's Gospel, good news, for the poor, there's liberty for the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, there's freedom for the oppressed, this is the favorable year of the Lord.

So, did they see the light? Well, after reading from the Prophet Isaiah, Jesus rolled up the scroll. After all, by the way, he's not giving any of the explanation I've done. He's just read it, at this point. He rolled up the scroll. He gave it back to the attendant, and he sat down. While everyone in the

synagogue waited for the attendant to place the scroll carefully, honoring it, putting it back in its chest, verse 20 says, “the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed upon him.” They’re staring intently at him. They’re not wanting to take their eyes off him for a moment, lest they miss something. Tension is building here while they wait to see what’s going to happen next and Jesus, as he opened his exposition from the text, he opened it with a simple, straightforward, by the way, absolutely shocking statement.

This is the third point in the outline: The statement, the statement. Look at verse 21, “He began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” Listen, when you get the gravity of what he just said, that is an utterly stunning statement of fulfillment. Just to show you what I mean, just to get the full significance, look back at verse 18 and notice this repeated use of the first-person pronoun. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon,” whom? “Me. Because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.”

Look, who’s at the very center of that passage from Isaiah? It’s not the prophet Isaiah. It’s some other voice. It’s not some other unnamed, indeterminate prophet of the future. This

anointed one is none other than Messiah himself. Because after all the word *ha'mâshach* refers to anointing. It's the anointed one and now, here he is. Jesus points to the voice recorded in Isaiah's prophecy and he says, that's me. That took the air out of the room.

By the Spirit, Isaiah looked ahead to this very moment and, also by the Spirit, Jesus was looking back to Isaiah's prophecy. A little time warp thing is going on here, as the past has met the future in the present, right? Or, if that sounds too complicated, just stick with what Jesus said, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." This is the beginning of the year of the Lord's favor, and Jesus came here to announce, the Messianic program is now underway. It's kicking off.

So as I said, they asked the question, but how did they receive the news? The next verse seems to indicate they received his words very well, right? Verse 22, "All spoke well of him, marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth." But sadly as we know, we've read the whole account, this initial reception hid an unbelieving heart. Rather than see him for who he really is, as the Messiah of God, they couldn't stop seeing him as Joseph's son.

They weren't getting it. It's not necessarily that that's an insult to call him Joseph's son, it's just what they thought was the most important fact. But they're making a grave error about Jesus' true identity. They're not listening. And notice what it says there, the contrast, the eyes of all were fixed upon him, and Jesus says this is fulfilled in your what? Hearing.

He gets the attention off of the eyes, off of the visual, and puts it on what can be heard. Jesus says, Are you listening? Are you listening? He had told them clearly, but they were not listening. And the reason is that their hearts were not right. Condition of their hearts, it does become readily apparent as we keep reading, but we can also see a subtle and yet very clear indication of their heart condition in what we've already read. It's clear in what Jesus read, yes, but it's also clear in what he didn't read from Isaiah 61.

When Jesus read the passage in the synagogue that day, he read from the Hebrew text. He unrolled a Hebrew, a scroll of Hebrew writing. What Luke has provided in his Gospel for us, the readers who are reading it, it's the same thing that Jesus read, but it's from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. And when Luke puts it in here, this Greek

translation, and when Jesus read it, both Jesus and Luke omitted a clause from Isaiah 61:1.

And it's fascinating to see what Jesus did not read to the congregation in Nazareth. Here's the phrase, "He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted." In fact, listen to the whole quotation from the Hebrew of Isaiah 61:1 and 2, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." Here it is, "He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted," and then, "to proclaim liberty to the captive, the opening of prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance," of our Lord, "of our God, to comfort all who mourn."

Jesus omitted the part about binding up broken-hearted sinners and he ended the reading in the middle of the verse before, of the day, the day of the Lords' vengeance. Why? He read the rest of the text, so why omit these two portions? Because, quite simply, those portions didn't apply to those people. The condition of poor, captive, imprisoned, blinded, oppressed or bound, those descriptions are facts.

Those descriptions are true of all fallen sinners no matter what they think about themselves, whether they know it or not, whether they realize it or not, whether they acknowledge it or

not. All of that just described their true state of being. The omitted sections, though, the sections he didn't quote, the part of the text that refers to broken-heartedness, that, that refers to mourning.

Those sections describe people who have come to recognize their condition and acknowledge that they are, indeed, poor, in prison, blind, and oppressed. These people did not realize that yet. They weren't broken-hearted over their sin. They didn't mourn. They were like the Laodiceans that Jesus rebuked later on for the same mind set, by the way, Revelation 3:17; it sounds like the same language, "For you say 'I am rich and I have prospered and I need nothing,' not realizing," Jesus said, "that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked."

People of Nazareth, like many people in our own day, many, by the way, beloved, religious people, church-going people, good friends and neighbors and relatives of yours and mine. They're in the same condition. They are all also wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. But you know what? They don't see it because they won't see it. They won't admit it. And so, they have cut themselves off from the promise.

This word broken-hearted is very graphic. It's the word *shâbar*, broken, and it's connected, joined together with the

word for heart, *lêb*. It's the, it's a verb stem here, which is the passive voice, and so it means to, to be broken-hearted, that broken-heartedness has come upon me. It's to be broken, to be shattered, to be crushed; it's for those people, that they will be healed; it's for those people, that they will be comforted.

Listen, no one finds salvation who doesn't realize that they're lost. Coming to Christ means that you come broken-hearted over your sin. It means that you become, you come mourning over your pitiable, wretched condition. And that's why Jesus said, right in the Beatitudes, early on, he said, "Blessed are those who mourn," right, "for they shall be comforted."

Those who mourn, the broken-hearted, they mourn, because they're *ptōchōs*, they're spiritual paupers, they're beggars. They have no claim on divine grace at all. They mourn, they're broken-hearted because they recognize their enslavement to sin. They recognize their spiritual captivity and blindness in the dungeons of sin. They're broken-hearted because they, they know that they're weighed down with a debt that they can never repay. And they have no hope that anybody from the outside will ever see them there, ever set them free. So they mourn.



The broken-hearted find no hope in themselves, so they look for all they can look for, mercy. They longingly plead for help that comes from outside of themselves. They look for someone else to save them. Someone else to set them free. Someone else to heal them and comfort them. Those who mourn, the broken-hearted ones, they are the ones, and, by the way, they alone, they're the ones whom God will heal, whom God will comfort.

A lot of people that come to the church for counseling, and they, they want something fixed. I mean, we all want something fixed; we all want to grow. But some people come and they receive counsel from the Word of God, they receive, and many of you have done this, you have counseled people, you've given them the Word, you've given them solid principles, and intellectually they understand everything you're saying, they even assent to it, they agree with it. But you know what? Their hearts aren't truly broken. That's something you and I can't see on the outside. Only God knows. Their hearts aren't broken.

Only a broken heart can be healed of its broken-heartedness and Jesus omitted this part from Isaiah 61 because these people in front of him were unwilling to examine themselves in the light of God's Law. They were, unlay, unwilling to lay themselves out before the sterile light of the examination room

that would shine all the light on all the darkness in them. They didn't want to come humbly to Christ, to bow before his holiness, to admit that they're poor, in prison, blind and oppressed.

Nazareth was not ready. In fact, all of Israel wasn't ready for the extension of this promise. Not yet. The people, they still need to learn to be broken-hearted over their sin, to mourn over their spiritual condition, to look upon him whom they have pierced and to mourn and to long for his salvation. I'm so grateful to know, because it's written in the Word of God, that that will happen to the people of Israel one day. I pray that God would speed that repentance.

What about you? What about you? Would you come to the sterile light of God's truth and let yourself be examined? Will you let God flay you open by his Word, by that sharp, penetrating sword, and open up your life and let his Word do its healing work?